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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 27 March 2012 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly and has the honour to inform him that the Government of Japan has decided to present its candidature to membership in the Human Rights Council for the term 2013-2015 at the elections to be held in 2012 in New York. The Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations would be grateful if the present note verbale, with its annex, could be included in the final document to be produced for the forthcoming elections, and would also appreciate it if it could be circulated among the Member States.

Japan looks forward to continuing to play an active role, in concert with other States, in the Human Rights Council, which is responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, the Government of Japan has the honour to submit a set of pledges and commitments to the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 (see annex).

* A/67/50.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 27 March 2012 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Japan to the Human Rights Council, 2013-2015

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

Basic human rights policies of Japan

1. Upholding the highest standards of human rights enshrined and guaranteed in the Constitution of 1947, Japan has consolidated its democratic political system and has developed policies for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as universal values.

2. Japan firmly believes that the promotion and protection of human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community. It is therefore committed to addressing grave violations of human rights. Japan believes that the culture, religion, history and traditions of each country must be taken into account when addressing human rights issues, and will seek to achieve progress through dialogue and cooperation based on an approach that is tailored to meet the specific aspects of the country, region or theme concerned.

International commitments and pledges for the promotion and protection of human rights

Conclusion and implementation of the international human rights instruments

3. Japan has concluded the international human rights instruments listed below and will continue to make the utmost effort to implement its obligations. Japan will duly follow up on the recommendations it has received in order to fulfil its commitments under the treaties and work in cooperation with the treaty bodies:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1979)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1979)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1995)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1985)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1994) and its two Optional Protocols (2004 and 2005)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1999)
- Geneva Conventions of 1949 (1953) and their first and second additional Protocols of 1977 (2004)
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1981) and its Protocol (1982)

- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2009)

4. In 2007, Japan signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is now working towards its early conclusion.

5. Japan is giving serious consideration to the individual communications procedure.

6. Japan is working towards the early conclusion of the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction with a view to protecting the best interests of children.

Activities of the Human Rights Council

7. Japan will continue to be actively engaged in the activities of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review, so as to promote the improvement of human rights situations in various countries and regions. During its continuous membership in the Council from its establishment to 2011, Japan has taken an active role in the discussions of the Council and in the adoption of its resolutions.

8. Japan has promoted international initiatives to eliminate discrimination and support marginalized groups. For example, Japan submitted a draft resolution on persons with leprosy which was adopted by consensus in September 2010 (Council resolution 15/10).

9. Japan has taken an active role in the review of the Human Rights Council. Japan remains committed to improving the work and functioning of the Council so as to maximize its efficiency and effectiveness.

10. Japan sincerely took note of the outcome of its own universal periodic review of May 2008, and in March 2011 voluntarily published the status of the follow-up to the recommendations it accepted.

Cooperation with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and special procedures mechanisms

11. Japan will continue its full cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, her Office and special procedures mechanisms. Japan has extended an official standing invitation to all thematic mandate holders, in view of their important roles.

Contribution to the work of the General Assembly and the Security Council

12. Japan will continue to participate actively in discussions on promoting human rights in the General Assembly, including through submitting draft resolutions to the Third Committee. Japan will steadily continue to promote the Security Council's policy agenda for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, inter alia, the protection and empowerment of women and children.

Promoting human rights through bilateral cooperation

13. As stated above, Japan will continue to attach great importance to dialogue and cooperation that is based on mutual understanding and respect. Japan has held

regular bilateral dialogues and consultations on human rights with the Governments of more than 10 countries. Japan will continue to promote democratization as well as protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with its human rights policy concerning Official Development Assistance (ODA). In particular, Japan will focus on providing support to vulnerable groups such as children and persons with disabilities and to protect their human rights. In line with its Initiative on Gender and Development announced in 2005, Japan continues to ensure that a gender perspective is incorporated into all sections and every stage of ODA processes.

Financial assistance

14. In 2009, Japan's bilateral ODA disbursements reached $354.45 million for health and welfare, $1,870.75 million for gender equality and $95.94 million for peacebuilding. In fiscal year 2009, disbursements for measures pertaining to persons with disabilities amounted to $1,687.46 million.

15. Japan continues to support human rights activities of United Nations organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In fiscal year 2010, Japan contributed approximately $5 million to UN-Women. Japan, as the top Asian donor to OHCHR, will continue to support its activities including by making voluntary contributions.

Promoting human rights in Japan

16. In line with the obligations stipulated in the international human rights instruments to which Japan is a party, all relevant Government agencies continue to promote and protect human rights in various fields within Japan. Japan will follow up on the recommendations of the universal periodic review, which it accepted in 2008, and recommendations it has received from human rights treaty bodies. Japan will continue to enhance its dialogue with civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and to implement the policies and measures in the areas described below in order to enhance the protection of vulnerable groups.

Gender equality

17. In December 2010, the Cabinet adopted the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality, towards the realization of a gender-equal society. It is an effective action plan that consists of 15 priority fields and 82 performance objectives. Japan aims to increase the representation of women in leadership positions to at least 30 per cent by 2020 through specific "positive actions".

Combating trafficking in persons

18. Japan continues to implement domestic measures and pursue international cooperation in this area. Japan revised its existing action plan and formulated Japan's 2009 Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons in December 2009.

Rights of the child

19. Japan will continue to implement the Comprehensive Measures to Eliminate Child Pornography adopted in 2010. Japan has reviewed the existing measures and introduced new laws such as the revised Child Welfare Law (2008) and the revised Civil Code (2011) and will steadily enhance various measures such as those against child abuse.

Indigenous peoples

20. Japan will continue to promote comprehensive and effective policy measures for the Ainu people, taking their views into consideration through various channels, inter alia, the Council for Ainu Policy Promotion with the participation of Ainu representatives.